The Interspecies Newsletter

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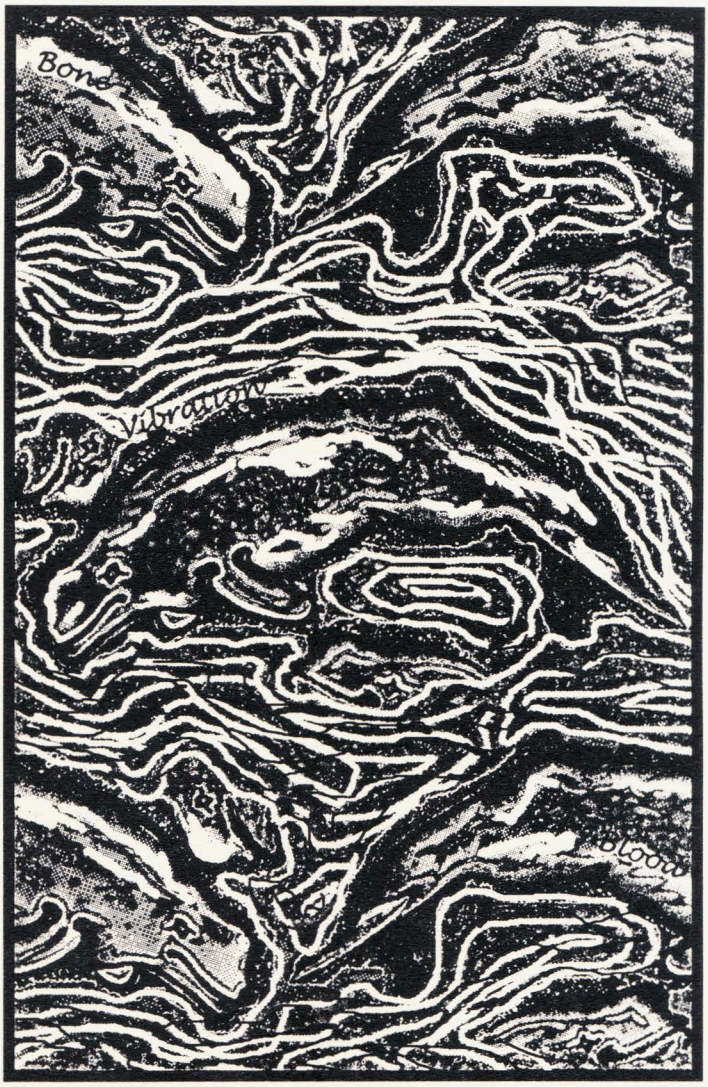
Dolphins in the Lake

My new book, **The Charged Border: Where Whales and Humans Meet,** *will be released next month by Henry Holt to positive pre-publication reviews. The story attempts to make sense of the unique bond that attracts human beings to cetaceans. Individual chapters focus on the work and perceptions of field biologists, environmentalists, whalers, artists, and the media. This excerpt is taken from a chapter about mystics and the growing phenomenon of dolphin swims.*

—Jim Nollman, March 1999



I am invited, with my wife and two young daughters, to join eleven other people in a weeklong dolphin workshop held on a secluded island beach north of LaPaz, in Baja California. Our leader is Carolyn Pettit, forty six, who has been leading "dolphin facilitated swims" for five years. She is a vivacious red-headed woman with flashing green eyes, a former therapist for the terminally ill, who returned to school in her thirties to get a master's degree in marine biology. Carolyn refers to her current calling as a dolphin channel. "I always wanted to make a difference," she declares to the group assembled on the sunny foredeck of a large trimaran carrying us to the remote island where we'll live for the next week. "I never found the handle until dolphins entered my life. The first time I swam with them I knew there was something electric about it that I had to share with other people. They make my job easy. Everybody feels good around dolphin energy."

In a few respects, Carolyn reminds me of a biologist. Both serve as play-by-play commentators of the charged border where humans meet cetaceans, both are cetacean professionals who seek the jolt of recognition that comes whenever a noticeable pattern leaps from the random field of marine mammal behavior. But their viewing platforms are different. In the biologist's world, humans stand at the apex of a Darwinian pyramid built on intellect. The perks of living life at the top include a clear conscience while manifesting such techno-behavior as shooting a dart into whale hide to acquire genetic material. The dart clearly distresses its victim, although its utility remains legitimate and unquestioned as long as the distress increases human knowledge.

Carolyn's influences are more diverse than most of the biologists I know. The meditation she espouses finds it roots in Buddhism. Seeing God in everything is distinctly Hindu. She quotes the medieval nun, Hildegard of Bingen, and the Lakota shaman, Black Elk to explain why modern people must honor a spiritual linkage with other species. She acknowledges Saint Francis of Assisi and the Bushmen of South Africa as past masters of the fine art of communicating with animals. When all these influences mingle inside Carolyn's mind, what emerges is a modern, "future-primitive" expression of ***animism***, the most ancient statement of human spirituality, teaching the essential belief that all natural phenomena are alive and all living creatures have souls. Animism shows nature to be a congregation of spiritual cousins; some members are ill-

behaved, some cooperative, others are tricksters, gift-givers, communicators. All are peers, all possess wisdom. Humans are the best at being human beings, just as worms are the best at being worms, and coyotes make the best coyotes.

In this view, nature is emphatically not a pyramid, but rather a vast and mysterious intellect Carolyn refers to by it's modern, paradigm-shifting name, *Gaia*. Gaia's essence flows bountifully from the Earth like myriad springs gushing from a cliff face and flowing into a huge lake. Carolyn has convened this dolphin workshop to show each of us how to surrender to the flow. Our objective is to float downstream to the lake without drowning. Once there, we must continue swimming to attain a suitable place to view Gaia unimpeded by the shadows that loom along the shoreline.

How do we find the lake? Carolyn quotes Ishi's famous dictum that "human beings are smart, but not yet wise." She believes we need a totem animal to serve as our mentor. A totem is an animal, a plant, or even a rock we treat as a member of our immediate family, like an older brother or sister whose steady presence in our lives affirms a sense of belonging to the community of nature. A totem is a navigator able to guide a person who has strayed too far from the lake. A totem speaks to us directly, although only a believer can plainly hear the advice. Carolyn's own totem is the dolphin. She swims with them in the sea, that they may invite her to swim with them in the lake.

It would be a mistake to dismiss Carolyn's worldview as "newage" and therefore ungrounded. She may be a bonified mystic, but she is neither anti-intellectual nor disdainful of logic. Carolyn can spout cetacean behavior as well as any biologist. But she is an artist who adds improvisatory twists to her dissertations, much the way Eric Clapton appends extra notes onto a common melody to make it his own. "If you insist upon reducing nature to hierarchies," she tells us, as we gather the hot sun to our faces, "then by any quantitative measure of brain and nervous system, cetaceans reside at the top of the pyramid. Their powers include psychic energy as well as intellect."

I am learning to understand Carolyn's "psychic energy" as variously, a place, a vitality, a talent, an ethic, and an attribute of nature. It exists everywhere. Those who perceive it live in a world where the air itself tingles. They detect portents in star patterns, are able to hear the animals, the trees, even the rocks conversing among themselves. Having seen it, found it, listened to it, they grant authority to intuition. These seekers relish the fact that information about psychic energy resides in first-person anecdote rather than data. The lines that separate subject from object, metaphor from reality, and yearning from observation, are never so finely drawn as the biologists insist. No landscape is firm. The earth and its denizens continually shape-shift in synchrony with each person's altered perception. Within Gaia's lake, synchronicity itself is an everyday occurrence.

Text and Pixels

This relativity of perception means there can be no experts—only points of view. Whereas a biologist finds deep contentment declaring, "I have the answer", Carolyn is equally tickled to announce, "I feel it's energy." To her, learning the slippery truth about whales and dolphins is not a straightforward result of careful observation and good note-taking. To know the cetaceans is to open one's heart to the energy fields she insists emanate from them more clearly than from any other animals, humans included. Every person feels this charge to a certain extent. How else to explain the six million people around the world who will go whalewatching this year? It's not just marine mammals they want to see. They seek a hit from an energy field found only by wading in the lake.

The difference between marine biology and Carolyn's shamanism is a religious distinction. Both believe their worldview is the only real one. A biologist's certainty is essentially mechanical, masculine, yan. Carolyn's is communal, feminine, yin. One biologist colleague of mine once assured me that "out there" remains the same no matter who observes it. A branch dropping in a forest makes the same sound no matter who hears it or even if no one hears it. Carolyn disagrees. "Out there" is emphatically different from observer to observer. The branch makes a sound if no one hears it. But everyone hears it differently.

A biologist may make a thousand distinct observations to explain one aspect of dolphin behavior. A hundred other biologists may concur. To Carolyn, their judgment is valid, but only as a statement of the scientific point of view. A different point of view will produce an equally valid explanation because the sleek gray shape we call a bottlenose dolphin is a construction our brain manufactures from input provided by crude human sense organs. The viewing process is analogous to peering at a computer screen. Most people see the text, ignoring the building block pixels that compose them. Biologists look a bit deeper than most people, perceiving text and pixels. Carolyn perceives the text and the pixels, but also the excited molecules that compose the screen's images. Consider this metaphor another inadequate explanation of psychic energy.

The skipper has turned off the engine. He raises the sail, steps below to liberate four bags of corn chips which he serves with a smoky *chipotle* salsa. I munch a handful, then close my eyes to listen to the rhythm of many teeth crunching chips over bass notes played by the wind puffing the sail. Carolyn talks about pixels and text "upholding the dominant culture's belief in objective observation." She mouths the last phrase with the same derogatory tone some biologists I know reserve for anthropomorphism. "No one is objective because no one can stand outside the world and watch the goings-on unaffected. That would be like playing at Greek Gods,

The raven who is a salmon, Cree

peering down on nature from the clouds of Olympus. If we want to know the dolphins, really know them, we have to stop playing, and start acting like Gods. These are creatures of vibration as much as of blood and bone. Until more people begin to see the dolphins this way, I harbor little hope for our species survival."

With my eyes still closed, I ask Carolyn why scientists don't perceive the dolphins as she does. "From the time we're born," she responds, "we're taught it's useful to interpret the world on a solid, informational level. Psychics perceive the world differently—not because they possess different receptors—but because the cultural programming of their brains was never complete. They are modern shamans, what anthropologists refer to as 'wounded healers'." Ironically, this term also suggests that anyone who belittles Carolyn's shamanic talent actually corroborates her hold on that entitlement.

Mesoplodon

The trimaran arrives at a glorious sand beach near the northern tip of *Isla Espiritu Santo*, thirty miles north of La Paz. The skipper drops anchor, two inflatables and several kayaks shuttle us and our mountain of gear to shore. Everyone dons a hat with a brim and dark sunglasses to cope with the intense light. As much as the sun, the silence of the desert environment overwhelms my senses. Running to the edge of the beach to gather up a stray daughter, the sound of my footprints reverberates with every step, tricking me to sense an invisible walking partner. We assemble our tents at the back of the beach. Closer in, next to a boulder the size of an elephant, a kitchen is constructed from a remarkable collection of folding aluminum tables, chairs, and shelves. The food bins are placed in the cool shadow behind the rock. Setup complete, The skipper bids us adieu, and sets sail back to town. He will return for us in seven days.

After lunch, the group gathers on the white sand beach to stare at the jagged purple and orange striped spires of the

The spirit who is a snake, Choctaw

Gigante mountain range that loom on the horizon fifteen miles across the Sea of Cortez. We are nine women, three men, and two little girls. This tally upholds my suspicion that the pursuit of dolphins interests women far more than it does men. This is substantiated by a hunch of mine that surrender is an experience sought more often by women than by men. And for every woman out in the water surrendering to dolphins, there is a man caught up in the market-driven capitalism that results in the dolphin entertainment industry, the dolphin military budget, and the slaughter of million of dolphins in the cause of tuna-flavored catfood. And very few women. It seems the story of the world.

Actually, rattlesnake dancing aside, there may be no other human/animal relationship in which a wild animal is permitted to exert such reckless control over assenting human adults. If a few more people went off manifesting their version of the animal vision-quest with other species, one might assume that the world would become a kinder and gentler place. Except, as it stands, these sorties remain the dolphin's burden alone. For just one example, the African safari does not exist without land rovers and rifles. No one pays $2000 to trek onto the savannah to graze with zebras for a week, hunt with lions, pick over bones with jackels.

Carolyn sits down in front of us for orientation. Much of her rap is geared to issues of safety, paying attention to cactus quills on land and stingrays in the water. She leads us to a nearby tide pool to point out the identifying characteristics of five species of starfish and three sea urchins. Sitting around the tidepool she informs us that we may observe sperm whales, grays, and even blue whales from shore here at this time of year. Like a collector saving her best baseball card for last, she drops her voice to inform us that a year ago, she observed two unidentified individuals of the rarest genus of all, the mesoplodons, cruising along the shore at dusk.

Mesoplodons are considered rare because humans don't see them very often. I close my eyes and, in the spirit of Carolyn's relativistic view of observation, invent an alternate explanation for their aloofness. If whales communicate, and if they are intelligent, perhaps the elders of the mesoplodon genus observed the demise of their cousin cetaceans and made the strategic decision to avoid the human species altogether. They prosper, today, in the middle of every ocean, tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of scamperdowns and Hubbses, Trues and dense-beakeds diving for squid and reproducing their kind in the only place a cetacean Eden has a chance of existing: far from human beings.

Carolyn straightens her back and beckons us to close our eyes and breathe deeply. Ten minutes pass before she whispers to us, "We advance into a higher field of dolphin-evolved consciousness where beings of light reside. Many of you have already evolved to this awareness through channeling and dreams, but during this week we will physically visit many new realms of life to sense, on a cellular level, the three-dimensional world as an omnipresent four-dimensional reality." She pauses a moment, during which my literal mind struggles to render this cosmic rap into everyday terms.

According to Einstein, the fourth dimension is time, possibly rendering the "omnipresent four-dimensional reality" into a polysyllabic synonym for the old hippy axiom: "be here, now". "Physically visiting new realms" suggests we get to swim in the ocean with dolphins, rather than just dream about swimming with them as many in this assembly have been doing for years.

The dolphins off *Isla Espiritu Santo* play a role similar to Odysseus' sirens. They call sweetly to us across the waves, filling our heads with visions of a sensual paradise just beyond reach. One significant aspect of the myth has altered in the three thousand years between Homer and Carolyn. We trust these sirens, and therefore, no longer need to lash ouselves to a mast to avoid a face to face meeting. We can dive in and have fun. Except most of the people in our group display an aversion to the word 'fun' to describe our time together. A week spent among a friendly group of strangers swimming with dolphins and camping out on a warm sunny beach in Mexico is couched, instead, in a language more apropos to the Vedas than a Holiday Cruise brochure. We are not on vacation. This is a workshop, a retreat. We are pilgrims, not tourists. We have arrived here, not to swim in the water, but to enter a four-dimensional realm where we will be healed. Even the white sand beach presently being hollowed into thirteen peaches by the force of gravity pulling against thirteen pairs of buttocks, is a sacred border beyond which we encounter beings of light.

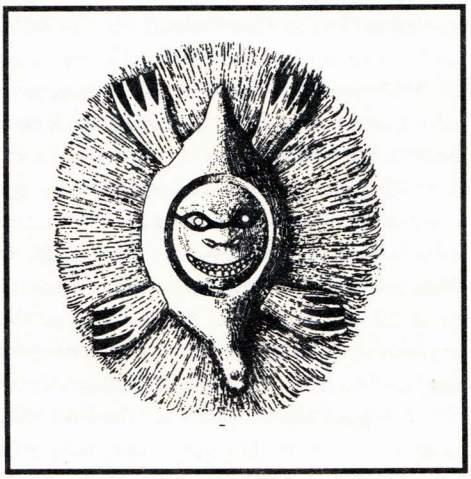
A Dolphin's Burden

Next morning, just after dawn, eight pilgrims including Carolyn and myself set off from shore in the hope of meeting dolphins. We push boogie boards in front of us for added buoyancy. Two people don wetsuits, two others opt for nudity. Carolyn has designated the center of the bay, two hundred yards from shore, as our interspecies meeting place. There we wait, immersed in the calm sea, a group of human heads garbed in goggles, with snorkels jutting upward at odd angles. A quick dive displays a separate world where blue hands and bluer feet paddle an isometric dance. That the flat sand bottom lies twenty-five feet below brings home the fact that few among us would willingly swim so far from a strange seashore without a purpose. I chuckle to realize that only in the water is sputtering and spitting not considered bad manners.

Thirty bottlenose dolphins round the corner of the bay and head straight toward us. They stop a moment, then start swimming back and forth. "They've come to see us." shouts Carolyn. "Greet them with your hearts!"

I find myself feeling cautious about her mantra of dolphin synchronicity. They do this for us when we open up to them. If they hadn't arrived so promptly, Carolyn would no doubt have concluded that our transmitters weren't tuned. It was our fault. We didn't call, so they didn't answer. Her certainty reminds me of psychic healers who insist we subconsciously invite disease into our lives. We bring on our illness and we bring on our dolphins through the same tenacious act of will. But just as the former proves a cruel and unnecessary burden to lay on the head of dying cancer patients; so the latter seems an unnecessary burden to place on these marine mammals.

A bottlenose dolphin rises to the surface a body length in front of me. I am hardly immune to its majesty, firstly drawn to the silky gray skin drawn tight over eighteen-inch long cheeks. The siren calls. If only I could draw close enough to rub my hand along its long cheek. I would be satisfied to do it just once. The animal is staring right at me. It's flat brown eyes are located on the sides of its head, but arranged in such an ingenious manner that the animal seems able to look forward stereoscopically, as well as sideways.



Spirit who is a beard seal, Inupiat

Directly above and between the eyes emerges a domed protruberance the size of a large cantaloupe, and appropriately called a melon. I know enough dolphin physiology to identify the melon as a fatty lens used to focus echolocation clicks. Having spent the past twenty-four hours listening to a discussion about the psychic abilities of dolphins, it is easy to understand how anyone might interpret this clicking sense organ to be a third eye, the seat of telepathic communication.

The dolphin exhales, a sound more reminiscent of a luffing sail than of the cavernous sonorities produced by humpbacks or grays. Although I'm aware that evolution has rotated the dolphin's skull 90 degrees to our own, observing the blowhole's position near the back of the head remains a disorienting sight. If my nose grew between my shoulder blades, why not toes on my knees, or ears sprouting from hips. A sharp one-second sucking sound followed by the clack of its air valve closing, tells me that that this dolphin is about to dive. I stick my head into the water, watch it barely flick its flukes to glide smoothly toward the open sea.

It flicks a second time, veers to the right to surface in front of Glenna, a twenty-nine year old ceramicist from Ojai California. Glenna goes beyond Carolyn in her certainty about dolphin intentionality. Sitting at the campfire last night, she stated flatly that the dolphins who frequent this bay have called us here. They have chosen, not just anyone, but us. Sticking my head in the water to watch five dolphins swim in a tight circle along the ocean bottom, I admit to some doubt. Cetologist, Kathleen Dudzinski, has informed me that this bottom-hugging tactic is "avoidance behavior or at least a distance increasing mechanism."

Trying to unravel Glenna's logic, I conjure up an image of these same animals forming a similar configuration two months ago. They force a stream of air from their blowholes in the manner of humpback lunge-feeders, although when dolphins blow bubbles it may actually indicate an aggressive exchange between

young adults. The bubbles slither to the surface growing larger as the water pressure decreases. Within the first set of bubbles, I see myself trying one activity after another in an attempt to brighten my dull life. In the next bubble, my mailman delivers Carolyn's tri-fold brochure. In the next one, my wife and I are sitting at the dining room table discussing our mutual desire to spend some time in sunny Mexico swimming with dolphins. In the next bubble I board an airplane with my family in tow. The last bubble bursts into the air displaying a diorama of our present group of eight sitting in front of the campfire agreeing to meet the dolphins this morning at dawn.

Whether we clothe ourselves as scientists or mystics, the rule makers and pattern finders among us only feel in touch with life by keeping a score card that offers some measure of control over what otherwise seems an aimless universe. Glenna shouts raucously to Carolyn, "You knew they would come this morning, didn't you?" As I sometimes turn off the play-by-play watching sports on TV, now I swim twenty yards from the group to meet the dolphins without having the experience marred by chatter about coincidence control.

The dolphins dive and soon leave the area. And from then on we spend most of our time waiting for their return.

Some members of the group don't know when to come out of the water. In a few more days, I will watch Junie, a fifty-two year old physical therapist from San Diego, need help getting back to shore. She suffered cramps and hypothermia. Later, I overheard her apologize to Carolyn for wanting just one, then another fleeting encounter with the dolphins. Carolyn shrugged her shoulders, frowned and murmured something about "know thyself". But most of us were shocked it had come to that. The dolphin as drug. A few camp mates exhibit clear signs of addiction denial.

Flailing

Treating dolphins as gurus sometimes seems a form of celebrity worship cut from the same cloth as fans who give deference to the opinions of sports stars instead of listening to the immediate needs of their husbands, wifes, children. Some critics even complain about the environmental favoritism demonstrated by dolphin celebrity. A donor gives huge sums of money to relocate a single celebrity orca like Keiko, while the donor's immediate environs remain polluted.

The promise of this so-called *Dolphinism* has been captured in dozens of films. These are of a different genre then the cetacean "nature films" that fill up so many biologists' schedules. Pretty people, often celebrities, dive into crystal clear waters to reach out to dolphins who make passes at them to the drone of an airy sound track. The swimmers resurface, expressing awe that such a miracle could be happening to them.

This growing film genre of light-hearted people swimming with smiling dolphins may be understood as the sunny flip-side to all the crisis management depicted in so many environmental documentaries illuminating the darkness found wherever resource-hungry people gnaw on nature. With the dark side so utterly gloomy, is it any wonder that the light side often appears lightweight?

Lightweightedness occurs because of the immense difficulty any film maker faces while translating the subtle anecdotal energies of the charged border onto a TV screen. Most people look silly underwater. Blue arms flail, cheeks and eyes bulge, noses and snorkels let loose with the occasional bubbly fart. Nothing much happens besides the occasional dolphin filling the same frame as goose-pimpled human bodies in bathing suits. An occasional touch between species is treated as if it was Will Mays' over-the-shoulder catch in the 1954 World Series.

The elusive dolphin smile that drew the audience in at the start, does not alter, finally revealing itself as a frozen mask. An earnest narrator insists that this clumsy exercise is a life-transforming experience of global import. But the audience increasingly perceives the dolphin's evasive maneuvers as evasive maneuvers.

The films fail for much the same reason flailing bodies in a pornographic film can't evince love. In fact, the fleeting glimpse of a dolphin swimming just out of reach does prompt transcendental experiences in swimmers, and quite often at that. But communion is not a spectator sport.

Waiting and Hoping

Some dolphin behavioralists accuse the swimmers of anthropomorphism—of putting the human agenda of friendly contact onto the dolphins. One biologist has told me "the bay is one of the places dolphins rest during the day. They feed nocturnally so they need a rest area to be able to forage efficiently. If they are displaced from it, the long term effects may include a decrease in reproductive efforts. They may be in the area the swimmers are and not really wanting to be near the swimmers...it may simply be a case of being in the same place at the same time."

Swimmers counter that the behavioralists' stingy depiction of dolphin motive is typically anthropocentric. The dolphins are actively engaging swimmers. Why else would they stay close for hours at a time? The bay is large. It would take little effort for the dolphins to move beyond the reach of any human swimmer.

Like a tale told by Dr. Seuss, the feud inflates, anthropomorphs and anthropocents both insisting that their own interpretation is the only plausible one; neither group willing to entertain a third possibility: that the event in question is neither harmful nor premeditated.

The total experience bolsters my hunch that dolphin swims are more sensuous than they are mystical, although I can endorse Carolyn's Tantric view that treats the two as synonyms. The sea is warm. Our adrenalin is flowing in ways that would never occur if we were watching these animals from a boat. Here in the water we are as close to being dolphins as we will ever know. Their splashing makes me splash. Observing all that silky dolphin skin drifting past my outlook, sleek, shiny, svelte, muscular, makes it easy to understand why some members of our group find it so difficult to keep their hands to themselves.

Gazing upon the erotic dolphin's grin makes me grin. What does it matter that this Mona Lisa smile is an accident of evolutionary musculature? Peering into their pointed faces makes me wish any lover in my life would have ever smiled upon me with so much delight.

Beluga Film

The last newsletter contained a detailed account of an IC field project developing in the Russian province of Karelia, adjacent to Finland. This sub-arctic land along the White Sea is rich in petroglyphs carved in the granite bedrock, and depicting ancient Finns and Saamis honoring their animal totems. At the mouth of the Uma River lies an especially abundant site discovered in 1996 and dated to 5000 BCE. Among other subjects, the Uma River glyphs show shamans interacting musically with beluga whales. Herds of beluga whales are commonly sited just offshore of the site. Because the area was once nearby to the USSR's most infamous Gulag, these animals have not been hunted for at least the past 75 years. As we approach the millenium, the Uma River mouth, remains one of the few places on earth where the endangered beluga whale is actually thriving.

IC's Finnish colleague (and webmaster of the Lycos whalewatching site), Rauno Lauhakangas, is now working closely with the Russian Academy of Science to preserve and study the sites. He has also started consulting with the Karelian provincial government to study the feasibility of a tourism based on whale and petroglyph watching. It was on Rauno's invitation that IC's Jim Nollman visited Karelia in September to speak at the Russian Academy of Science about beluga whales, interspecies communication, and the international growth of whalewatching.

Things developed. Jim wrote an account of his experience, interpreting some of the more intriguing petroglyphs, and speculating on ways the whales and carvings might spark the birth of Karelian eco-tourism. He concluded that eco-tourism would help protect the whales.

The essay failed to interest a magazine publisher. But it did attract the attention of Canadian film makers Patricia Sims and Michael Clark of Canaz Productions. Michael and Patricia have already collaborated with IC on a recent project. Last summer in Alaska they started filming a documentary based on another Nollman concept—basically *My Dinner With Andre* meets the humpback whales. The completed pilot is composed of spectacular humpback footage shot by The Alaska Whale Foundation, juxtaposed with time-lapse panoramas of the Alaska wilderness and overlain with a soundtrack that highlights a wide-ranging conversation between Jim and distinguished whale biologist Fred Sharpe.

As this newsletter goes to press, Canaz has raised the lion's share of the funds needed to start production of an hour-long documentary to be filmed at two Arctic sites during summer 1999. The film will contrast Inuit beluga hunters who are quickly depleting the beluga population along Baffin Island, with the efforts of the Karelians to preserve the local whale population and also rediscover their own aboriginal roots through the interpretation of the ancient petroglyphs.

The Inuit's example deserves more explanation. The beluga whale is an endangered species throughout most of its North American range. However, an aboriginal dispensation has been granted to the Inuit by the Canadian, U.S. and Danish (Greenland) governments, that permits the largely unsupervised hunt to continue. But the hunt is no longer "aboriginal" by any stretch of the imagination. What once was conducted with skin kayaks and harpoons, is now undertaken with fast motorboats and assault rifles.

At certain places, the Inuit are not only permitted to kill the whale for their own community subsistence, but also to sell the meat to other Native communities. The result is a disaster. In Hudson Bay, and off the coast of Greenland, beluga populations have recently started to crash from overhunting. In Alaska's Cook Inlet, opening a commercial aspect to the aboriginal hunt has depleted the local whale population by over fifty percent in just the past five years.

No one in a position of governmental authority is taking steps to control the killing. Nor has any group taken the initiative to speak against the whales current plunge towards extinction. It is a difficult task. The recent Makah fiasco makes it quite clear that confronting native "rights"—no matter how unconscionable its expression may be—is a thankless task, often showing little result.

Naturally, all of us involved hope this film will shed a compassionate light on the issues at stake.

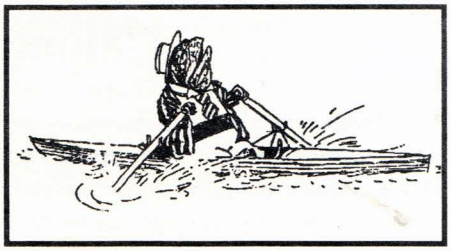
IC plays a central role in the film. We have been invited by the Russian Academy of Science to work aboard their research ship in August to conduct a study into the capabilities of the White Sea belugas to communicate with human beings. Using both the latest digital audio algorithms as well as 5000 year old stone instruments discovered near the Karelian site, we will attempt to develop an acoustic and musical relationship with the whales. We are now finalizing plans to attempt something similar, in June, with the huge 1000 member herd of beluga whales that gathers around the mouth of the Cunngham River in the Canadian High Arctic.

The beluga may possess more distinct types of calls than any other species of animal. Unlike dolphins, almost all beluga calls are audible to the human ear. Cognitive scientists have long regarded the species to be one the most communicative cetaceans, and therefore one of the best candidates for interspecies communication research. John Lilly believes the species possesses the rudiments of a language. The beluga's brain is larger than our own, including a larger neo-cortex which is commonly regarded to be a center for cognitive thought.

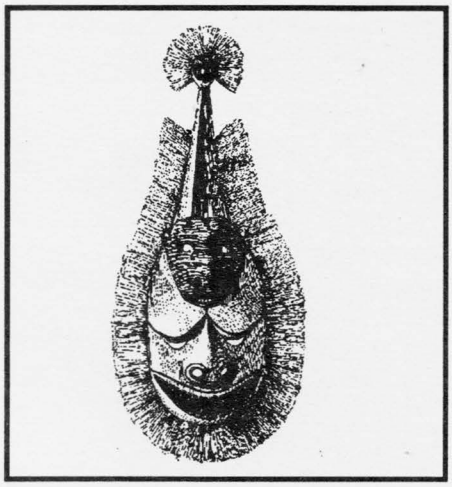
How ironic, and yet fitting, that species has proven nearly impossible to teach the tricks common to the Oceanarium trade. That researchers have not yet plumbed the wild beluga's language, is mostly a result of its remote Arctic habitat.

This project and film will make a difference about how the world perceives beluga whales. So far, our endeavor has acquired the aura of a science fiction tale about a group of humans setting the stage to communicate with an intelligent race of alien beings.

Expect a full account in a future newsletter.



from Wind in the Willows



Spirit who is a whale, Inupiat

A Call for Art

We've had some success in our recent fundraising effort to purchase a computer for multimedia and website production. The software is especially daunting to learn, but incredibly powerful to use once the tools are mastered. Unfortunately, last newsletter's bold prediction that the website would be up by February, has proven to be woefully over-ambitious.

As expected, graphics are emerging as a key element of the overall design. We now anticipate the website to become a showcase for artists working with animal images. The art will come from two sources—either original "bubble art" that first saw the light of day as the cover of a past newsletter, or bizarre animal renderings as lifted from old sea maps and Renaissance engravings.

In either case, the black and white artwork will be handled the same way. The image will be scanned and then rendered into fantastic textures and 3-D shapes through the magic of ***Photoshop***.

We are now actively seeking computer artists to take on a drawing and render it in any way he or she sees fit. IC will provide the black and white image via email. Our only stipulation is that the final output be composed in either of the two standard web formats of GIF or JPEG. Maximum file size is 20K.

If you'd like to contribute, write IC at beluga@rockisland.com

Book Review

Song for the Blue Ocean

by Carl Safina, Henry Holt Co. 1998

Nature cries out for better storytellers working the human information paths and capable of reaching large audiences. It seeks talented people capable of telling the truth about habitat and species destruction, but without turning either too sentimental or coldly detached from their subject.

Carl Safina is that rare talent, a biologist who advocates change with a deep abiding passion for his subject; a great storyteller who tells his mesmerizing tale of real people harming and protecting nature with a clear literary voice. The book focuses on the death spiral of tuna, swordfish, salmon, forests, coral reefs, and inevitably zooms in close to show the human face driving the disaster. But somehow, the book's tone rarely falls to gloom and doom. *Song for the Blue Ocean* gets my vote as the best nature writing of 1998.

...Joe's still hopping mad about the impending season closure, which means canceled bookings and returned deposits that have already been spent. He says he doesn't want to kill more fish, he just wants to have the season last.

...Gerry addresses the delegation, saying again that if we must err, we must err on the side of employment.

...The faster young salmon got downriver in the currents, the better they survived. That's what they were engineered by evolution to do. Water spilled past the dams would take young fish with it—just like the river. But engineers and power advocates refused to let young fish have the water for migration out, because that's water that could instead make electricity.

My Year of Meats

Ruth L. Ozeki Viking, 1998

This off-the-wall and hugely entertaining novel just won a major book award which it roundly deserves. I now hear it's going to be made into a major film. Let's hope they do it right. It's the story of two women. The first is a Japanese American film maker hired by the U.S. meat lobby to direct a weekly show for Japanese TV, about Americans who love to cook and eat meat—a different family, a different locale, a different recipe each week. The second is an anorexic woman living in Tokyo whose ambitious yet vacuous husband dreamed up this bizarre TV show. How the two women meet and end up affecting each another, proves to be a tale well worth telling.

The description of animals, as commodities and, well, as meat, meat, meat is both shocking and utterly surreal when one realizes that this is the way things actually work in the food industry.

...There's a fairy tale about the first Japanese wanna-be astronaut, a drunken monkey, who saw the moon in a deep and quiet pool and bragged to his friend the badger that he could fly all the way there and bring back the moon in a bucket. He drowned in the attempt.

...And another thing you East Coast environmentalists are always griping about is organic waste pollution. Well, you should be real happy, 'cause this pretty much takes care of the problem, don't it. Feed the animals shit, and it gets rid of the waste at the same time. That's two birds with one stone."

...Anyone who travels around the sprawling heartland of this country must at some point wonder why American are so uniformly obese.